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THE IDAHO LANDS PROJECT:

PREPARING FOR THE FUTURE



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THE IDAHO LANDS PROJECT:**PREPARING FOR THE FUTURE**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Summary: A Rare Opportunity	1
The Public Need	2
The Land	3
The Resources	5
An Uncommon Alliance	6
BLM: A Uniquely Qualified Agency	7
To Make It Work	8
A Project That People Want	9
A Final Thought	10

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A RARE OPPORTUNITY

A rare opportunity is at hand for BLM in Idaho to fulfill a pressing public recreation need and acquire wetlands, wildlife habitat and other lands with high-value natural resources. BLM's acquisition efforts are strongly supported by an impressive array of public and private interests — county commissions and other local government entities, timber companies, chambers of commerce, elected officials, conservation organizations, outdoor recreation groups and many others.

The Idaho Lands Project proposes to acquire private holdings from landowners in the eleven northern counties willing to sell or exchange properties that have

important resource qualities. Recreation potential is one quality that is of special interest to BLM. Recreation, particularly boating, is booming in northern Idaho. Boat launches are congested during the peak season, with waits of up to an hour not uncommon. If BLM acquires property suitable for launch sites, crowding at the boat ramps will be relieved, safety will improve and a tremendous service to the public will be provided.

The Idaho Lands Project involves more than recreational property. Lands proposed for acquisition include three special recreation management areas, as well as a BLM-designated Area of Critical Environ-

mental Concern, Craig Mountain, the largest jointly managed wildlife management area in the state. The multiple-use benefits of the lands identified for acquisition are outstanding.

It's an unusual set of circumstances that allows The Idaho Lands Project to be possible — strong public support, an experienced agency interested in acquiring tracts of land with outstanding resource values, and the availability of the land itself.

But the opportunities that exist today may not not be available tomorrow. That's why it is imperative that public support and funding continue for The Idaho Lands

Project in the next few critical years. With that kind of backing, BLM can help Idaho prepare for the future. Without the support, the needs of northern Idaho may be far more difficult and expensive to meet, or worse, the opportunities may disappear permanently.

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THE PUBLIC NEED

The driving force behind The Idaho Lands Project is to fulfill a rapidly growing public need. A look at a few key facts tells the story.

■ Northern Idaho serves the recreation needs of a greater population than any other area in the state, and ranks only behind the Seattle/Tacoma and Portland regions in the Pacific Northwest. More than 500,000 people live within a 50 mile radius of Coeur d'Alene.

■ A 1987 University of Idaho study states that 40% of all Idaho leisure travelers visit the travel region that encompasses the five northern counties. This is by far the most-visited travel region in the state.

■ Not only does northern Idaho have the highest tourism level, but the same study also concluded that it has the highest potential for additional tourism growth.

■ The highest demand is for boat launch sites and campgrounds around the major lakes in northern Idaho. Yet less than two percent of Lake Coeur d'Alene's shoreline is publicly owned, effectively blocking most public use.

■ In 1988, 12,778 boats were registered in Kootenai County, where Lake Coeur d'Alene is located. Less than five years later, the number had jumped to 20,823, a 63 percent increase. Although Kootenai County has only 6.9 percent of all boatable water in Idaho, almost one in five boats statewide is registered there. Close to 50% of all boats registered in Idaho are in the eleven northern counties covered by the Coeur d'Alene District.

"It's to the point now where you just don't try to launch on weekends in the summer," says one boatowner. "It's a mob scene at every public launch."

Tourism is rapidly becoming the number one industry in northern Idaho. Much of the area's future economic growth and quality of life depends on the success of The Idaho Lands Project in the next few years.

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THE LAND

The properties sought in The Idaho Lands Project are varied in look, location and resources. They include land that is home to bald eagles and crossed by streams that are habitat for salmon and trout. Some are near BLM recreation sites and are visited by tens of thousands of people each year; others are isolated spots where elk or bighorn sheep exceed the number of humans who visit. They include arid canyon acreage on the Salmon River, frontage along the giant lakes of northern Idaho, and wetlands important to waterfowl and non-game species. Resource variety and benefits the

resources provide to the public are two key criteria when BLM considers properties that could become part of The Idaho Lands Project.

Initially, eight acquisitions have high priority with BLM.

BLACKWELL ISLAND

Blackwell Island is located along the Spokane River, just west of Coeur d'Alene. It's ideally suited for expanding boat access and lessening overcrowding at other nearby facilities. The parcel also

contains quality wetlands. Wildlife viewing, picnicking and fishing are some of the other possibilities the 32-acre parcel offers.

SOUTH FORK OF CAPTAIN JOHN CREEK

High value winter range for elk and mule deer, bighorn sheep habitat, wetlands and critical threatened chinook salmon spawning and rearing streams make the South Fork of Captain John Creek an acquisition priority. The 1,280 acres of private land is surrounded by state and federal holdings, part of the 125,000 acre Craig Mountain Wildlife Management

Area. BLM, Idaho Department of Fish and Game and The Nature Conservancy jointly manage the Craig Mountain Wildlife Management Area, making it the largest cooperative effort of its kind in Idaho.

COUGAR BAY

Wildlife viewing, wetlands and recreation potential make the 167 acres available at Cougar Bay a high acquisition consideration. The property is adjacent to Lake Coeur d'Alene and is sought by developers. BLM, The Nature Conservancy and a coalition of concerned citizens are working together to place the property in

PREPARING FOR THE FUTURE

public ownership and determine what needs to be done to maintain the unique values of this parcel.

FLYNN CREEK

The proposal for Flynn Creek involves a scenic easement of about 450 acres of Salmon River frontage. The easement would protect the visual quality of almost

three miles of the Salmon, shielding it from development that would be inconsistent with BLM's management objectives for the river.

MOWRY

This acquisition on Lake Coeur d'Alene could involve more than 1,300 acres that includes 1,400 feet of frontage in one of

the few remaining undeveloped coves on the lake. The property would complement existing public recreation lands located both to the north and south of the parcel managed by Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation.

SWAN LAKE

A popular fishing spot, wetlands and valuable big game and non-game habitat make the 37 acres at Swan Lake an attractive acquisition. The Swan Lake parcel, part of the Lower Coeur d'Alene River chain lakes, is the only remaining property with development potential that is not in public ownership.

BEAUTY BAY

This acquisition involves BLM, a private landowner and The Nature Conservancy. It would expedite donation of about

160 acres of land in Beauty Bay adjacent to an existing BLM recreation site. The additional property would potentially expand the recreation facility and protect bald eagle roosting sites.

BLUE CREEK BAY #2

Blue Creek Bay is a popular recreation spot near the east end of Lake Coeur d'Alene. The proposed acquisition of up to 300 acres is adjacent to a pending exchange area and would allow BLM to expand its recreation facilities, including boat launches. Bald eagles roost and feed in the area during the winter.

Resource variety and benefits the resources provide to the public are two key criteria when BLM considers properties that could become part of the Idaho Lands Project.

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THE RESOURCES

Acquisition of the properties identified by BLM means many things. It means more spawning grounds for anadromous fish and better riparian habitat. It means more habitat for game and non-game species, including the endangered bald eagle. Proposed acquisition also means more access to lakes and streams for rafters and power boaters, more places to hike, photograph and picnic. Acquisition would help to enhance the natural character of adjoining public land and resources.

■ *Ecosystem Management*

■ *Old Growth Forests*

■ *Riparian Communities*

■ *Anadromous Fisheries*

■ *Recreation*

■ *Neotropical Migratory Birds*

■ *Wetlands*

■ *Endangered, Threatened and Sensitive Species*

■ *Environmental Education*

■ *Historical Values*

■ *Wildlife Habitat*

■ *Biological Diversity*

AN UNCOMMON ALLIANCE

In a time when natural resource management and conflict are often synonymous, the cooperation among BLM, other agencies, conservation organizations and private groups is exceptional.

Private companies, conservation organizations, citizens, other state and federal agencies, professional associations, chambers of commerce and many others all support The Idaho Lands Project. Not only are these organizations and individuals supportive of the acquisition effort, in many cases they are playing an active role in helping to bring about public ownership of important sites. (See accompanying story.) Unlike many other acquisition programs, The Idaho Lands Project has encountered very little public skepticism or opposition. The reasons for the effort's popularity are simple.

One, The Idaho Lands Project provides a public service by dispersing boat use around Lake Coeur d'Alene.

Two, BLM only acquires property from willing landowners.

Three, private land near lakes and rivers is rapidly being developed. Sentiment is strong among northern Idaho residents for public ownership of some of these sites.

Four, BLM's record in northern Idaho is excellent for managing scattered tracts rich in natural resources.

Partnerships and extensive public support for a land acquisition program are essential for success. BLM has worked hard to ensure both for The Idaho Lands Project.

Acquiring Gamble Lake wasn't easy, but it was worth the effort, BLM people say.

That the exchange occurred at all proves the commitment of private and public interests to bringing lands with high-quality resources into public ownership.

Less than one-half mile from Lake Pend Orielle, Gamble Lake was a likely candidate for development and timber harvesting. The lake is home to whitetail deer, moose, osprey, bald eagles, geese and an array of ducks. Great blue herons have one of the largest rookeries in north Idaho on the site, and large-mouth bass, bluegill, perch and crappie inhabit the lake. Wetlands at the edge of the lake are outstanding. The nearby hills are covered with Douglas-fir, red cedar and grand fir.

A land exchange was viewed as difficult because the Gamble Lake property was owned by eight individuals who had undivided, unsurveyed interests in the 191 acres. Working with eight landowners with unsurveyed property is, at best, a complicated proposition.

Enter JD Lumber Co., of Priest River, Idaho. JD Lumber was interested in acquiring several isolated BLM parcels elsewhere in the Coeur d'Alene District. JD Lumber worked with BLM and the eight landowners, purchasing some of the interests outright and obtaining suitable land exchanges for others.

Ultimately, the company gained title to all eight interests and then transferred the acreage to BLM in exchange for equal value lands that BLM wanted to dispose of.

In addition to BLM's acreage, The Nature Conservancy acquired 200 more acres at Gamble Lake and the two organizations will coordinate management efforts.

So the bottom line looks like this: a private timber company, eight individual landowners, a federal agency and a conservation group all working together to spare an outstanding natural site from being developed.

"The Gamble Lake exchange was a win-win situation for all the people involved," says Fritz U. Rennebaum, BLM Coeur d'Alene district manager. "The diversity of interests turned out to be a benefit, not a drawback. We expect to see more of this kind of cooperation in the future."

PREPARING FOR THE FUTURE

BLM: A UNIQUELY QUALIFIED AGENCY

Five facts illustrate why BLM is the agency best positioned and qualified to acquire and manage these high resource-value lands.

NUMBER ONE

Expertise. BLM is adept at managing small tracts of lands, and unlike the U.S. Forest Service, is not constrained by agency boundaries. Much of BLM land, particularly in northern Idaho, is in scattered parcels. Many of them are heavily used by the public. Through the years, BLM has developed the expertise needed to manage, maintain and anticipate future trends that affect these tracts of lands. No other agency can make that claim.

NUMBER TWO

Experience. BLM has more practice in dealing with acquisitions and exchanges than any other agency, state or federal. The system is already in place, staffed by skilled, knowledgeable people.

NUMBER THREE

Partnerships. Acquiring land is a complex process, usually involving several interests. Often, outside participants are needed to complete an acquisition. That's when it's handy to have partners to turn to. BLM's partnership efforts for acquisi-

tion in Idaho are longstanding and respected. BLM works regularly with state and local governments, private industry and conservation organizations such as The Nature Conservancy or The Trust for Public Land.

NUMBER FOUR

Funding. As a result of the Arkansas-Idaho Land Exchange Act, Congress pledged to consider future funding for BLM to help offset the loss of public land in Idaho. These funds, which supplement traditional allocations from the Land and Water Conservation Fund, would be the foundation of an acquisition program

designed to meet the public's burgeoning recreation needs.

NUMBER FIVE

Enthusiasm. Yes, it counts. BLM employees are eager to take on the challenges attendant to acquiring land with valuable resources. They see this as an opportunity to fulfill a public need and at the same time demonstrate their capabilities to manage diverse resources.

PREPARING FOR THE FUTURE

TO MAKE IT WORK

A key part of the plan is a pledge from Congress to consider appropriating funds to BLM for the acquisition project as a result of the Arkansas-Idaho Land Exchange, enacted in 1992. That act designated 9,600 acres of BLM land in the Coeur d'Alene District be conveyed to a private company, Potlatch Corp. Another 9,100 acres of BLM land was transferred to the U.S. Forest Service to compensate for land it conveyed to Potlatch. In return, Potlatch conveyed more than 41,000 acres of Arkansas bottomland to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Much of the 18,700 acres formerly managed by

BLM was targeted for use in exchanges that would have brought key Idaho sites into public ownership.

The value of the public lands contributed by BLM in the act was \$27 million.

In 1993, BLM received a \$4.2 million appropriation for The Idaho Lands Project. That money is being used for acquisition of three properties possessing high public resource values. Future funding, including the \$5 million needed in 1994, will be used to continue the work

of acquiring high resource-value properties within the approved Idaho Lands Project area.

It's critical that the funding cycle not be broken. Land acquisitions are often lengthy, complicated and do not neatly fit into the annual budget process. Each step builds upon the previous step. If funds dry up, work on many acquisitions will stop and all the time, money and progress up to that point may be for naught as the window of opportunity closes.

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THE IDAHO LANDS PROJECT: A PROJECT THAT PEOPLE WANT

Editorial reprinted from the *Spokesman-Review*, Spokane, Washington, 26 March, 1993.

Every recreationalist in the region should support the U.S. Bureau of Land Management's plans for a major land acquisition on Lake Coeur d'Alene.

The agency wants to buy or trade for eight key areas on the lake — ranging from environmentally sensitive Cougar Bay to beach frontage at Mowry Park and a possible major boat-launch area on Blackwell Island at the head of the Spokane River.

If successful, the agency will open up about 1,700 acres on the lake to public access. Ninety-eight percent of Lake Coeur d'Alene's 105-mile shoreline now is privately owned.

The BLM's grand plans were made possible by last year's 57,000-acre land swap in Idaho and Arkansas. The

Potlatch Corp. received 16,455 acres of prime North Idaho timberland in exchange for 41,000 acres of Arkansas waterfowl habitat.

U. S. Sen. Dale Bumpers, D-Ark., sweetened the deal for Idaho by committing \$19.2 million to the Coeur d'Alene district BLM office to offset the loss in its trading stock.

Congress, however, budgeted only \$4.2 million for the Coeur d'Alene district this year, with plans to appropriate \$5 million more in each of the next three years.

Budget cuts could reduce those future appropriations. That's why members of the area's congressional delegation will be on the lookout for signs of public support for the BLM's plans.

The land earmarked by the agency represents some of the most controversial areas on the lake.

About 2,000 Kootenai County residents signed petitions last fall against a Hawaiian developer's plans to construct a small subdivision on Cougar Bay, a popular waterfowl viewing area. The BLM, working with The Nature Conservancy has made the purchase of 150 acres on Cougar Bay a top priority.

The BLM also is working closely with the Trust for Public Land to buy 30 acres on Blackwell Island, off U.S. Highway 95 just west of Coeur d'Alene. The property would provide Coeur d'Alene with a second major boat launch, taking pressure off the Third Street dock downtown.

Another important target is acreage in the middle of Mowry State Park, owned by Spokane surgeon Ralph Berg, Jr. The property includes 30 acres that divides 326-acre Mowry Park and prevents land access to state parkland on Gasser Point.

The state Parks and Recreation Department, which prepared a detailed plan for Mowry Park development, has tried unsuccessfully for years to obtain the Berg property.

Mowry Park, on the southwestern side of Lake Coeur d'Alene, is within easy reach of Spokane via the State Highway 27/Rockford route, as are Mica Bay and Windy Bay parks.

BLM showed its public mindedness by offering to swap forest land to the Idaho Department of Lands in exchange for the boater parks at Mica Bay and Windy Bay. The Department of Lands has planned to increase the lease rate on the two parks to a prohibitive \$30,000 annually, so the move will keep them open to the public.

BLM officials have redefined the concept of "public servant" in taking these bold steps and deserves public support.

A FINAL THOUGHT

The Idaho Lands Project is one of those exceptional endeavors that is strongly supported by many interests and provides a tangible, needed public benefit. Further, BLM is positioned through experience, expertise and

desire to turn the goals of the project into reality.

Timing is critical in the land acquisition process. Acquisition opportunities may vanish if landowners feel that steady progress is not being made. The key

to consistent progress is funding. Funding in the next few years is critical to ensure the day-to-day, month-to-month progress needed to complete The Idaho Lands Project.

The message is clear: what the public needs, BLM can provide through The Idaho Lands Project. And BLM wants the chance to do so.

